

# Telegraphy in the Confederate States of America

For the first time in the history of warfare, instant communication (beyond signal fires etc.) was utilized. On May 13, 1861, Confederate Postmaster General John H. Regan issued a proclamation assuming control of all postal operations within the Confederacy. Unlike the Union which utilized the services of private companies as well as the independently operated Military Telegraph, Confederate Telegraph service was under the control and direction of their Postal Department.

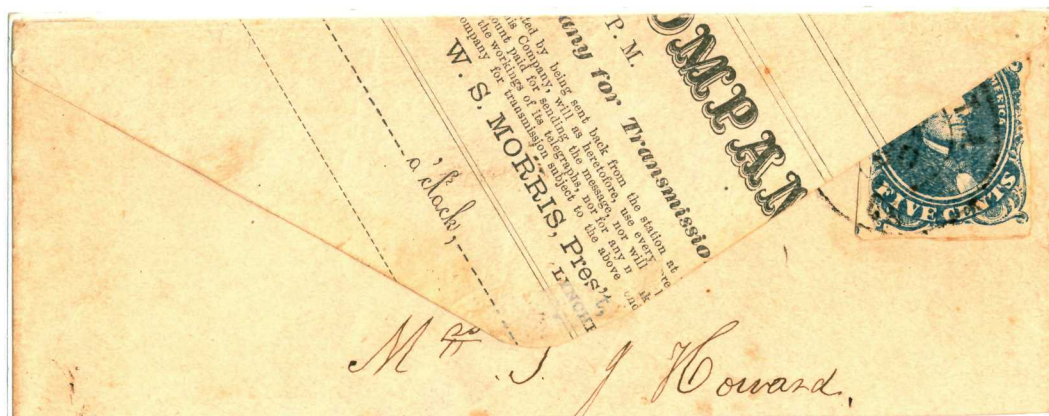
This exhibit will demonstrate the importance of the Telegraph during the war and early reconstruction just after. It is developed in a chronological order, allowing the items to form the story.

With the outbreak of hostilities on April 12, 1861, all Northern telegraph facilities in the South were either confiscated or would become allied under favorable terms to the Confederacy. The biggest loser was The American Telegraph Company, which had the most extensive North-South operation. The other major North-South company was the South-Western, which was controlled by Western Union.

As lines were often down, the Postal Systems were utilized. It should be recognized that sometimes the military telegraph form is the "cover", as covers per se were not always used in field conditions. As such, message forms are much more important to this subject than a letter to most other postal history.

## Plan of Exhibit

|                 |                                                                    |
|-----------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Row 1: 1861     | Confederate confiscation, Postmasters' Provisional usage           |
| Row 2: 1862 - 3 | Southwestern Telegraph Co., Confederate general issues             |
| Row 3: 1864     | Confederate general issues, General R.E. Lee field telegram        |
| Row 4: 1865     | Confederate cipher, Surrender of R.E. Lee, post war reconstruction |



"Adversity" cover fashioned from a Southern Telegraph Company form.

Of the 25± postally used Confederate Telegraph covers in private hands, those which are presented in this exhibit represent the largest assemblage yet formed. Rates: about half of the items show rates which varied from 5 - 10 cents per word in the beginning to 15 - 25 cents towards the end, - reflecting the terrible inflation.

A week after the proclamation by Postmaster Regan, The American Telegraph Company lines from Richmond and south were reorganized with other confiscated companies as The Southern Telegraph Companies on May 21, 1861. Existing forms and covers were used until exhausted.

"State artillery leave for Pensacola tomorrow seven (7) a.m. All well."

May 13, 1861

# AMERICAN TELEGRAPH COMPANY.

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## TERMS AND CONDITIONS ON WHICH MESSAGES ARE RECEIVED BY THIS COMPANY FOR TRANSMISSION.

The public are notified that, in order to guard against mistakes in the transmission of messages, every message of importance ought to be repeated by being sent back from the station at which it is to be received to the station from which it is originally sent. Half the usual price for transmission will be charged for repeating the message, and while this Company, will as heretofore, use every precaution to ensure correctness, it will not be responsible for mistakes or delays in the transmission or delivery of repeated messages beyond five hundred times the amount paid for sending the message, nor will it be responsible for mistakes or delays in the transmission of unrepeatd messages, from whatever cause they may arise, nor for the delays arising from interruptions in the workings of its telegraphs, nor for any mistakes or omission of any other Company over whose lines a message is to be sent to reach the place of destination. All messages will hereafter be received by this Company for transmission subject to the above conditions.

J. KENDALL, Gen'l Sup't,  
145 BROADWAY, N. Y.

E. S. SANFORD, Pres't,  
145 BROADWAY, N. Y.

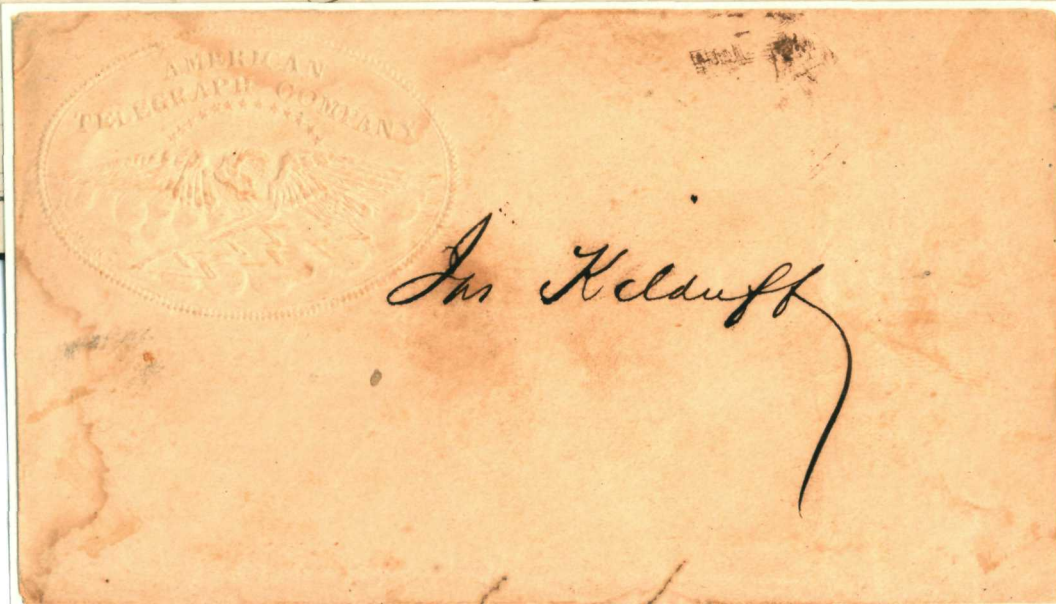
Received at *Mobile* *May 13* 1861. at *1* o'clock, *0* minutes.

By telegraph from *Montgomery* To *James Kilduff*

*State artillery leave for Pensacola  
tomorrow seven (7) a.m. All well.*

*Geo Lyons Jr*

10.50  
CENTS  
KD



Montgomery, Alabama - by wire - Mobile  
CSA Postal Department private delivery (10 words / 50 cents)

Montgomery was the first confederate capital (February 4 - May 29, 1861)  
(CSA records note that James Kilduff, the recipient, was mustered out of the Army September 25, 1865.)

August 20, 1861



received by wire at Augusta, Georgia - Confederate P.O. "PAID 5" - Athens, Georgia

The addressee was the wife of General Howell Cobb.

Although there is no year date given, the Confederate postal rate was 5 cents in August, 1861, and changed to 10 cents on July 1, 1862; therefore, this is an 1861 cover.

The Southern Express Company began with the purchase of all rights, routes, equipment and offices in the south from the Adams Express Company on April 8, 1861, four days before the declaration of war. This combination of an embossed American Telegraph Co. and Adams Express handstamp was short lived.

Adams (Southern) Express Company

October 4, 1861



received by wire at Augusta - Adams Express - Norfolk, Virginia

Montgomery, Alabama Postmasters's Provisional

July 26, 1861

The initial Confederate postal rate was 5 cents. This strike is known used from June 4, 1861 at least until the first stamps were received in Montgomery in October.

## SOUTHERN TELEGRAPH COMPANY.

### TERMS AND CONDITIONS ON WHICH MESSAGES ARE RECEIVED BY THIS COMPANY FOR TRANSMISSION.

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Received at \_\_\_\_\_ 1861 at \_\_\_\_\_ o'clock, \_\_\_\_\_ minutes.

By telegraph from *Savannah July 25 To R A Baldy*

*Stephen is safe.*

*Behm & Porter*



Savannah, Georgia - by wire - Montgomery  
Confederate Postal System - Griffin, Georgia

Apparently, Griffin, Georgia did not have telegraph service. As Griffin is about 40 miles south of Atlanta, just why this message was sent from Savannah through Montgomery, Alabama is not clear.

On May 21, 1861, the Confederate Congress passed an act which voided the renewal of the Morse patent, thereby depriving the South-Western Telegraph Company of patent protection within the Confederacy.

Seven months after this telegram, 1500 of its 2100 miles of lines were confiscated from Louisville south on the grounds that its officers were Unionists. The Southern (Confederate) Telegraph Company appeared to have snared another victim, but the South-Western protested, citing that the Confederate section of the company had been reorganized, and was run by its southern stockholders.

# South-Western Telegraph Company.

THE PUBLIC are notified, that in order to guard against mistakes in the transmission of messages, every message of importance ought to be repeated by being sent back from the station at which it is to be received to the station from which it is originally sent. Half the usual price for transmission will be charged for repeating the message, and while this company will, as heretofore, use every precaution to ensure correctness, it will not be responsible for mistakes or delays in the transmission or delivery of repeated messages, beyond an amount exceeding two hundred times the amount paid for sending the message; nor will it be responsible for mistakes or delays in the transmission of unrepeat messages from whatever cause they may arise, nor for delays arising from interruptions in the working of its Telegraphs, nor for any mistake or omission of any other Company, over whose lines a message is to be sent to reach the place of destination.

All messages will hereafter be received by this Company for transmission, subject to the above conditions.  
N. GREEN, Prest., Louisville, Ky.

By Telegraph from *Camp Wood 20 1862*  
To *P. W. Simmons*  
*Prior is better will*  
*write*  
*E. I. Hooker*  
*1st Lieut*

SOUTH-WESTERN & WESTERN UNION  
TELEGRAPH.

LOUISVILLE OFFICE, - 213 WEST MAIN ST.

*P. W. Simmons*  
*A. W.*

# Confederate States of America:

Post Office Department,  
FINANCE BUREAU;

Richmond, Oct. 10<sup>th</sup> 1862.

Dr W. S. Morris  
Agent for Telegraph Lines,  
So much  
of the order of August  
22nd ~~taking possession~~ by  
which the government  
took possession of certain  
telegraph lines, as applies  
to the lines of the South  
Western Telegraph Com-  
pany has been this day  
revoked. Please com-  
municate this to those  
lines by telegraph.

Very Respectfully  
John H. Reagan  
P. M. General

Shortly after the outbreak of war, Confederate Postmaster General John H. Reagan assumed responsibility for all telegraphs in the south.

In this significant document, Reagan instructed Dr. William S. Morris, president of the Southern Telegraph Company, who it is believed, designed the confiscation of the Southwestern so as to eliminate the major competition, to communicate a revocation of the August 22nd confiscation order.

On July 1, 1862,  
the Postal Rate  
was increased  
from 5 cents  
to 10 cents.



received by wire at Marietta, Georgia July 16, 1862  
Confederate P.O. - Roswell, Georgia

The distance between Marietta and Roswell is approximately fifteen miles. Perhaps the "Telegram" notation entitled this piece of mail to priority treatment. There was probably a lack of, or temporary disruption of, the telegraph service between the two towns.

The Southern Express Company (non matching form and cover)

February 27, 1863

**The Southern Express Company,**  
Forward Packages by Passenger Trains & Steamers, and Dispatches by Telegraph  
to all parts of the Confederate States.

The following Dispatch was received by Telegraph, at \_\_\_\_\_ o'clock \_\_\_\_\_ min. *Feb 27 1863*

Dated *Hillsboro*

Addressed to \_\_\_\_\_

*Two (22) Boxes*

*5 coll 12*

**SOUTHERN EXPRESS COMPANY**  
**TELEGRAPH.**

For *Col Sharp*

*Statesville*  
*NC*

Charges \_\_\_\_\_

Telgraph rate: "5 (words) / coll 1.25"

CSA cert

# THE SOUTHERN TELEGRAPH COMPANIES.

Office Hours, 7 A. M. to 10 P. M.—Sundays, 8½ to 9½ A. M., and 7 to 9 P. M.

*Terms and Conditions on which Messages are Received by these Companies for Transmission.*

The public are notified that in order to guard against mistakes in the transmission of messages, every message of importance ought to be repeated by being sent back from the station at which it is to be received to the station from which it is originally sent. Half the usual price for transmission will be charged for repeating the message, and while these Companies will as heretofore use every precaution to insure correctness, they will not be responsible for mistakes or delays in the transmission or delivery of repeated messages beyond five hundred times the amount paid for sending the message, nor will they be responsible for mistakes or delays in the transmission of unpeated messages, from whatever cause they may arise, nor the delays arising from interruptions in the workings of their Telegraphs, nor for any mistakes or omissions of any other Company over whose lines a message is to be sent to reach the place of destination. All messages will hereafter be received by these Companies for transmission subject to the above conditions.

J. R. DOWELL, Gen'l Sup't, Richmond, Va. 2

W. S. MORRIS, Pres't, Richmond, Va.

Received at *Milford* *May* 186 *at* *5* o'clock, *minutes*,

By telegraph from *Milford S. D. Mrs. A. A. Ferrill*

*Left at 10 o'clock yesterday for home  
and through the fight & was  
well on the 5th. The enemy driven back  
25/20000*



Milford, Georgia - by wire - Columbus, Georgia  
Columbus P.O. - Huntsville, Alabama

**Telegram to the mother of Captain Ferrill:** "yesterday he had been through the fight & was well all the boys from the neighborhood well & the enemy driven back". 25 (words) / \$2.80

May 5, 1864

THE RICHMOND AND DANVILLE RAILROAD TELEGRAPH,  
EXTENDING FROM  
RICHMOND TO DANVILLE,  
And Connecting at Richmond with the Southern Telegraph Companies.  
ALL COMMUNICATIONS STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL.

Dated *Petersburg May 5<sup>th</sup>* 1864  
Rec'd, *Drakes Branch* 1864, *7* o'clock, *00* min. P. M.

To *Capt E R Baird ADC*  
*You had better come to*  
*Petersburg as soon as you*  
*can instead of going as you*

*understand*  
*yesterday to*  
*station*  
*Pickett*  
*charge*  
*Ar 48*

The Richmond & Danville R. R. Tel

Extending from Richmond to Danville,  
*southern*

And connecting at Richmond with the American Telegraph Company

Telegram

*Capt E R Baird ADC*  
*Drakes Branch*  
*R to R R*

*39c + 10c postage Due*  
*Please pay it to Mr. Merrill & Co. for*



"You had better come to Petersburg as soon as you can instead of going as  
you might have understood my telegram yesterday to Hanover location"

Petersburg, Virginia - by wire - Drakes Branch - mailed to nearby addressee  
(To Capt. E.R. Baird - in charge of reserves)

The Richmond and Danville Railroad Telegraph was affiliated with the Southern Telegraph Companies; the cover notes confiscation of the American Telegraph Company. The expensive rate of 15 cents per word ("\$.30") is reflective of the 1864 economic problems of the south.

This writer ponders: why was this military information mailed instead of hand carried from the telegraph office? Above is the only recorded complete message and cover of this company.

# THE SOUTHERN TELEGRAPH COMPANIES.

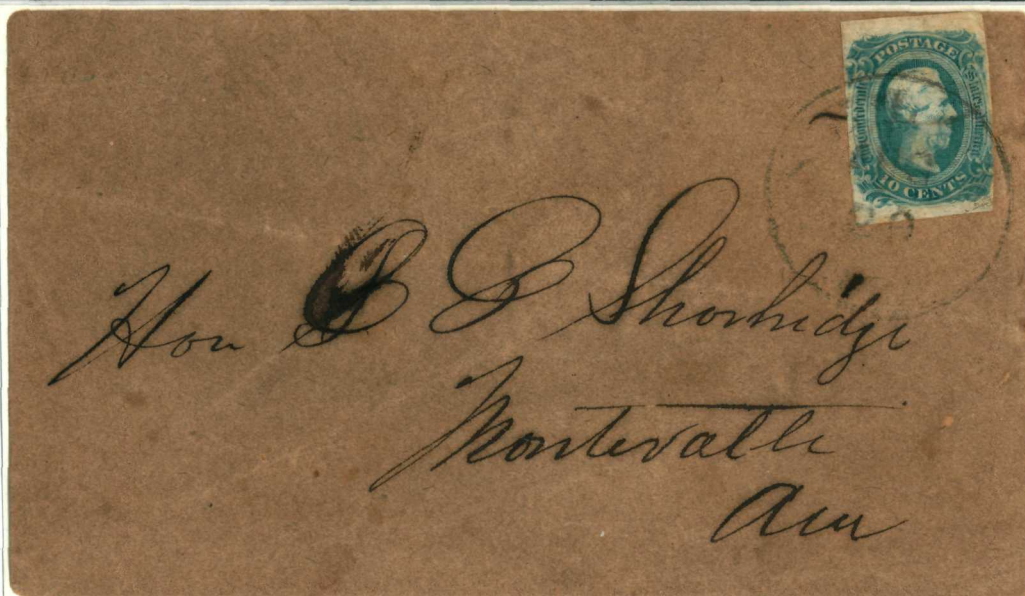
*Terms and Conditions on which Messages are Received by these Companies for Transmission.*

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J. R. DOWELL, Gen'l Supt Richmond, Va.

W. S. MORRIS, Pres't, Richmond, Va.

Received at *Selma Aug 27* 1864 at *Atlanta* To *Hon B B Shorthidge*  
*Montevallo*  
*Frank was killed on the*  
*24th. He died as he had*  
*lived a hero*  
*P. S. Lewis*  
*1573 pay 10*



"Frank was killed on the 24th. He died as he had lived a hero."

Atlanta, Georgia - by wire - Selma, Alabama  
 Confederate Postal Department - Montevallo  
 Telegraph rate: "15 (words) 73 (cents) pay 10 (cents)"

Considering the text, the addressee was  
 requested only to reimburse for the postage.

## SOUTH WESTERN TELEGRAPH CO.

## SOUTH WESTERN TELEGRAPH CO.

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JOHN VanHORNE, President, Mobile, Ala.

and against mistakes in the transmission of messages, every message sent back from the station at which it is to be received to the station from which it is originally sent. Half the usual price for transmission will be charged for repeating the message, and every precaution will be used to insure correctness, they will not be responsible for mistakes or delays in the transmission or delivery of repeated messages beyond five hundred times the amount paid for sending the message, nor will they be responsible for mistakes or delays in the transmission of unrepeatable messages, from whatever cause they may arise, nor the delays arising from interruptions in the workings of their Telegraphs, nor for any mistakes or omissions of any other Company over whose lines a message is to be sent to reach the place of destination. All messages will hereafter be received by these Companies for transmission subject to the above conditions.

JOHN VanHORNE, President, Mobile, Ala.

By Telegraph from *ma Sept. 25 1864*To *Mrs. Dr. Hamilton**Mobile Oct 10 1864**of Wafford*

*What a lot of  
ul... lot of  
say...  
rounds from Canton  
report Dr. Richardson  
to you*

SOUTH WESTERN TELEGRAPH CO.

*Mrs. Dr. Hamilton*

NOV

*Maj. Wafford**Canton*

CSA cert →

(note:  
the forms are photocopied  
from reverse side)

Selma, and Mobile, Alabama - by wire - Canton, Mississippi - local drop rate

It is unclear as to why there was a long gap in between the date of the transmissions (September 25th and October 10th) and the "OCT and NOV" strikes which are on the face.

These are the only recorded surviving examples of the Confederate two cents drop rate on a telegraph form.

Preparing Escape from Savannah

Field Telegram

probably December 7, 1864

Robert E. Lee

Gustave T. Beauregard

Braxton Bragg

Gustave T. Beauregard

GTB

R. E. Lee

## THE SOUTHERN TELEGRAPH COMPANIES.

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J. R. DOWELL, Gen'l Sup't, Richmond, Va.

W. S. MORRIS, Pres't, Richmond, Va.

Received at *(Copy of this sent to Gen Hardee)* 1864 *4:15 PM* at *4:15* clock, *15* minutes,

By telegraph from *Augusta* To *Gen G T Beauregard*

*Following dispatch just recd from Gen Wheeler near Sylvania Dec 7 7 am Davis fourteenth (14th) Corps and Kilpatricks Cavalry passed down river road yesterday - made many inquiries relative to Hudsons Ferry.*  
*3/536 BC Braxton Bragg*

Augusta, Georgia - by wire - Charlestown, South Carolina  
by military courier to G.T. Beauregard

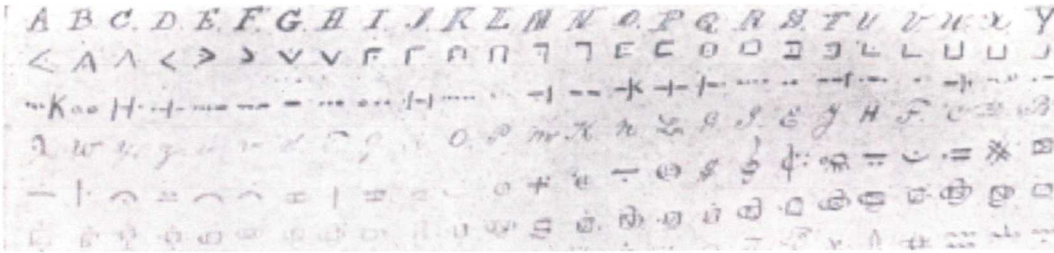
**Relay by Braxton Bragg to General G. T. Beauregard:** "Following dispatch just received from Gen Wheeler near Sylvania Dec 7 7 am Davis fourteenth (14th) corps and Kilpatricks cavalry passed down river road yesterday - made many enquires relative to Hudsons Ferry."

**General Beauregard was in or about Charlestown on December 7th and 8th. The whereabouts of General Lee was not recorded; however, his countersignature on this telegram established his position.**

**Pencilled:** "Operator will send this dispatch to Gens Hardee & Jones - if it has not already gone to them --- return this one" - **twice initialed "GTB"**

**Penned:** "Copy of this sent to Gen Hardee & Gen Jones 4 PM".

# The Confederate Cypher Code



This Confederate Cypher Code was found on April 6, 1865 by Union troops among the archives of the Confederate State Department in Richmond.

General Beauregard to President Jefferson Davis

January 15, 1865

152

Meridian 13  
 Prest Davis

I regret to inform you that  
 from Gen Taylor report of the  
 disorganization & demoralization of the army of  
 Tenn and from the Bad Condition  
 of the common roads and Railroad  
 hence to atguita (possibly a ruse for  
 Aquilla or Atlanta) No rei  
 nforcements can be sent in  
 time to Gen Hardee From that ar  
 my what does not now number  
 fifteen ? (this writer would conclude  
 'thousand' as there are eight letters)

G.T. Beauregard  
 Genl

74/8532

Meridian 13 (January 15, 1865)  
 Prest Davis

I regret to inform you that  
 from Gen Taylor report of the  
 disorganization & demoralization of the army of  
 Tenn and from the Bad Condition  
 of the common roads and Railroad  
 hence to atguita (possibly a ruse for  
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 nforcements can be sent in  
 time to Gen Hardee From that ar  
 my what does not now number  
 fifteen ? (this writer would conclude  
 'thousand' as there are eight letters)

G.T. Beauregard  
 Genl

The War is Over!

April 9, 1865

"Lee and Army surrendered yesterday to Genl Grant"



J. J. S. WILSON, Sup't  
Eastern Division,  
SPRINGFIELD, ILL.

**CATON LINES.**

E. D. L. SWEET, Sup't  
Western Division,  
CHICAGO, ILL.

**Illinois & Mississippi Telegraph Company,**

In Connection with all other Lines in the United States and Canadas.

**Terms and Conditions on which Messages are received by this Company for Transmission:**

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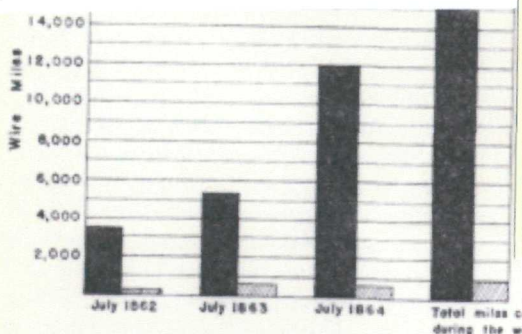
J. D. CATON, Pres't, Ottawa, Illinois.

By Telegraph from *Chicago* *April 10 1865*  
To *H. S. Wright*  
*Lee & Army surrendered*  
*yesterday to Genl Grant*  
*Col 9th*

**CATON LINES.**  
**Illinois and Mississippi Telegraph,**  
Office, *Chicago*

*H. S. Wright*  
*Col 9th* *Caton*

Wire Miles  
of Military Telegraph in operation  
Union black C.S.A gray



WIRE MILES OF MILITARY TELEGRAPH IN OPERATION  
UNION AND CONFEDERATE FORCES DURING THE WAR

This chart illustrates the enormous communication advantages that the Union had over the C.S.A.

Union source: report of Secretary Edwin M. Stanton  
C.S.A. source: Report of John T. Regan P.M. General

## Reconstruction

American Telegraph Company / Southern District  
Under control of U. S. Military Telegraph

July 25, 1865

### THE SOUTHERN TELEGRAPH COMPANIES.

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J. R. DOWELL, Gen'l Sup't, Richmond, Va.

W. S. MORRIS, Pres't, Richmond, Va.

Received at \_\_\_\_\_ 1865 at \_\_\_\_\_ o'clock, \_\_\_\_\_ minutes.

By telegraph from *Augusta 25* To *Capt A A Buck*  
*Amiens Ga*

*In your monthly inspection report for July there are seven absent commissioned officers not accounted for by name send complete list of absent commissioned officers immediately by Command of Maj Genl Sheridan*  
*Chas Grant*

### American Telegraph Company,

SOUTHERN DISTRICT,

UNDER CONTROL AND SUPERVISION OF U. S. MILITARY TELEGRAPH

*Capt A A Buck*  
*Inspector*  
*Amiens Ga*

The final chapter of Civil War telegraphic history is vividly illustrated on this page and the next. The U.S. Military Telegraph Commission remained in the former Confederate States for a brief period following the war.

The above telegram requested an accounting of seven absent commissioned Confederate officers. It was written on a left-over form of the Southern Telegraph Companies and enclosed in a newly printed American Telegraph Company envelope which by this time had recovered nominal control of its southern routes.

## Reconstruction

American Telegraph Company / Southern District  
Under control of U. S. Military Telegraph

August 7, 1865

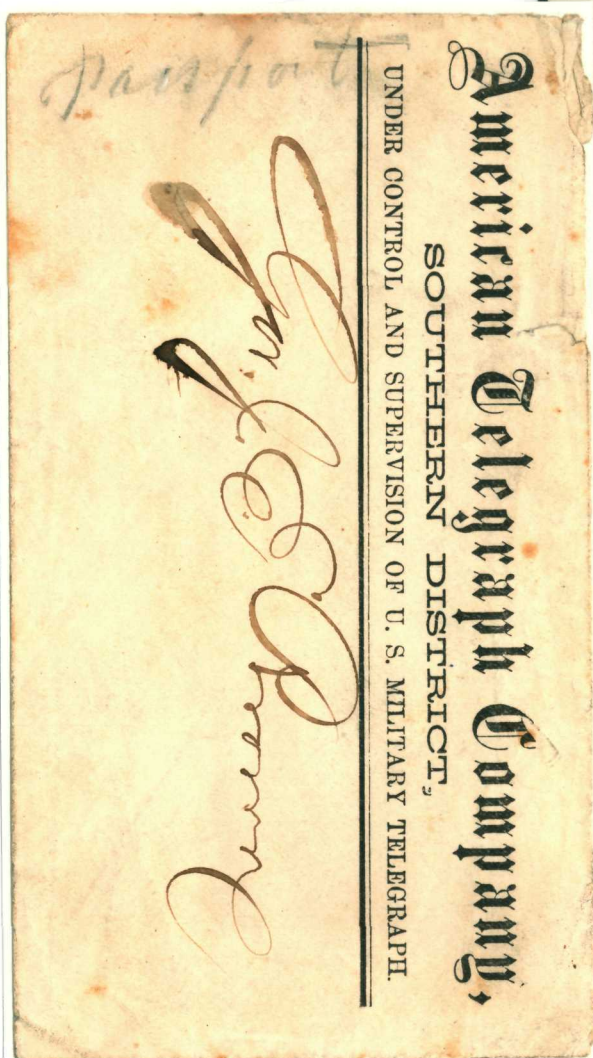
"Passport"  
from  
Andrew Johnson  
Pres't U.S."

**AMERICAN TELEGRAPH COMPANY,**  
SOUTHERN DISTRICT,  
UNDER CONTROL AND SUPERVISION OF UNITED STATES MILITARY TELEGRAPH.

By Telegraph from Washington  
Dated August 7 1865.  
To Gen. J. E. Brown.

You are authorized to  
visit Washington City on  
your parole.

Andrew Johnson,  
Pres't U. S.



"You are authorized to visit Washington City on your parole."

This telegram was sent by President Johnson to Joseph Emerson Brown, the former governor of Georgia, who was imprisoned following his imposed resignation of office on June 7, 1865 as a protective measure on his behalf.

Brown did visit Washington in 1866, and probably used this "telegram document" as his "passport" (penciled vertically on the cover).